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Editorial

AUTHOR/REVIEWER: A CASE OF SPLIT PERSONALITY

"I ran outta gas. I had a flat tyre. I didn't have enough money for cab fare. My tux didn't come back from the cleaners. An old friend came in from outta town. Someone stole my car. There was an earthquake, a terrible flood, locusts. It wasn't my fault. I swear to God!" These are the excuses that, in a legendary *Blues Brothers* scene, Jake (John Belushi) uses to explain to the Mystery Woman (Carrie Fisher) pointing a machine gun to his face why he did not show up on their wedding day. We thought this was hilarious and unbeatable. Yet, you dear reviewers (and dear authors) exceeded our rosiest expectations.

Following our nagging for late reviews, we learned that one reviewer had to take their cat to vet, another was busy buying Christmas presents, one was planning their holidays, an unfortunate one had their office broken into, others were marking exams, had to assist their aunt undergoing a surgical operation, misjudged their availability, lost the relevant correspondence, could not access email for weeks, were in a depressed mood, hated academic chores, agreed to review whereas indeed they really intended to withdraw, or were just too busy to reply.

Dave Skinner in his amusing book "*Why Steve was late*" illustrates 101 exceptional excuses to be used to justify our tardiness. These include getting lost in one's own duvet and being attacked by Ninja. The explanations for being late that we are given, are a good match.

Recently, we received a fuming message from an author protesting that they did not get feedback about their manuscript within six weeks from submission. Messages from this author, rightly displeased by our slowness, became frequent, wordier and more irate as days went by. This author had reason to complain, but our editorial response was hostage to late reviews. This author was not alone in criticizing our overdue response; we received a second remonstrance at about the same

time. This second manuscript was also held up by an unhurried reviewer, who, in an interesting twist of fate, was the very same irate author of the first manuscript. We then contacted the first author, doubling as slow reviewer, who was quick in pointing out that they “ran outta gas, had a flat tyre...”

Dear reviewers/authors, we all at some point ran outta gas or have a flat tyre. However, please consider that the only way a journal can offer swift feedback to authors, is to be prompt in offering our comments when we swap hats, and dress up as reviewers. In a peer-review system, we each play different characters in the same plot at different times. It is therefore up to us to make the whole system expeditious enough to be acceptable. Short of abiding with the invasive market of pay-as-you-go vanity publishing (Bohannon, 2013), solid peer-review is the best democratic system we have to protect our science. Whinging as impatient authors whilst excusing ourselves as tardy reviewers is not a solution. It would help if we all abode by the golden rule of doing “unto other as thou wouldst they should do to thee”: being fast and thorough when reviewing, as we would like reviewers be when we take our turn as authors and are on the receiving end.

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References

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